



FREE PUERTO RICO!

Newsletter of the Free Puerto Rico Committee,
North Americans in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence

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April 4, 1990: Puerto Rican POWs mark 10 years in US prisons

Looking Back...Moving Forward



Puerto Rican Nationalist Lolita Lebrón demonstrates to support captured POWs in May 1980.

The Puerto Rican independence movement has always been characterized by boldness, determination and sacrifice. None exemplify this commitment to struggle—this will to win—better than the 14 Puerto Rican Prisoners of War (POWs) currently held in US jails. On this, the 10th anniversary of their capture, we in the **Free Puerto Rico Committee** salute their sacrifice and acknowledge their significance.

The US government has tried, with every means at its disposal, to pacify the Puerto Rican nation and to destroy the independence struggle. Yet, threats, surveillance, long and inhuman jail terms, and even murder, have not stopped the struggle for freedom fueled by the ugly reality of US colonialism.

From the time the Puerto Rican Nationalists, led by Lolita Lebrón, attacked Congress in 1954, the struggle for independence has taken place not only on the island of Puerto Rico, but here within the US as well. In the 1970's, protests in Puerto Rican communities against police brutality, racism, decrepit housing, and discrimination in jobs forced a deeper analysis of the colonial reality of Puerto Ricans here in the US.

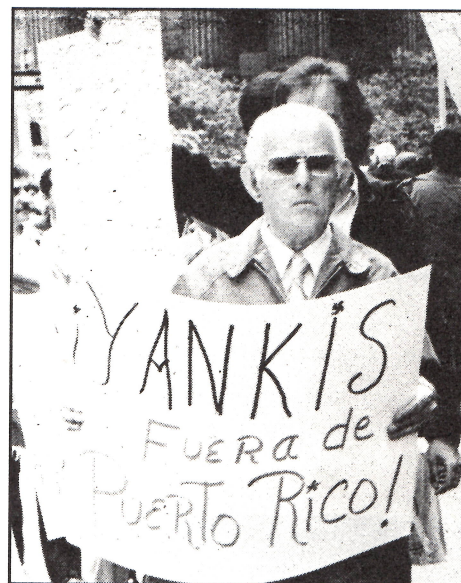
These protests formed the background for the development of a new, militant, armed struggle by sectors

within the Puerto Rican independence movement. The **FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional/Armed Forces of National Liberation)** carried out over 150 bombings against US military and corporate targets. These bombings challenged the myth of US omnipotence, and showed that more militant actions could be successful against the strongest military in the world.

On April 4, 1980, eleven Puerto Rican Prisoners of War—Ida Luz Rodríguez, Adolfo Matos, Carmen Valentín, Haydeé Beltrán, Dylcia Pagán, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jiménez, Carlos Alberto Torres and Alfredo Méndez (who later turned traitor) were captured in Evanston, Illinois. Later that day, Alicia Rodríguez and Luis Rosa were arrested. In May 1981, Oscar López-Rivera, and in June 1983, Alejandrina Torres, Edwin Cortés, Alberto Rodríguez and José Luis Rodríguez were also arrested. Each was a well known activist in the Puerto Rican community.

In each case, these men and women were charged with the highly political crime of "seditious conspiracy"—conspiring through the use of force or violence to overthrow the authority of the US government. As anti-colonial combatants, they took the position that they were Prisoners of War, and refused to recognize the jurisdiction of US courts over them. (José Luis Rodríguez took the position of political prisoner, stating that while he supported it, he was not part of the armed clandestine movement).

The POW position is based on international recognition of Puerto Rico's status as a US colony, which has been ratified yearly since 1973 by the UN Decolonization Committee. The position further relies on UN resolutions beginning with Resolution 1514, and subsequent resolutions, which state that colonialism is a crime; that colonized people have the right to fight for their freedom by any means at their disposal, including armed struggle; and that when captured, the Geneva Convention should be applied, and captured combatants should be treated as POWs. The POW position conflicted



Puerto Rican Nationalist Oscar Collazo in May 1980.

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Puerto Rican Prisoner of War



POW Ida Luz Rodríguez

*The following interview was conducted by **Free Puerto Rico!** with Puerto Rican Prisoner of War Ida Luz Rodríguez. Ida Luz is one of six Puerto Rican women Prisoners of War and two political prisoners currently held in US prisons. April 4, 1990 marks the tenth anniversary of Ida Luz's capture by the US government.*

FPR! What is the significance of being a women in the Puerto Rican independence struggle?

Ida Luz: I consider my participation in the independence movement as a long arduous process, but one with many rewards. There is no doubt in my mind that as a direct result of my participation, I have lived precious opportunities and gained valuable experiences.

The years of struggle have shown me that one of the most difficult battles that we face is the battle against ourselves. By ourselves, I mean our perceptions, our insecurities, the way the sexist, racist social structure has taught us to look at ourselves, others and the world as a whole. I will always keep in mind Che's thought which attempted to communicate to us the idea that a new society is built by the new woman and the new man. In other words, the struggle begins at the level of the individual. And, I consider this the hardest battle we need to fight.

The battle becomes even more difficult and more complicated for women born in this society. Since the moment of my birth, I have been bombarded with a set of values, expectations, and a limiting framework not unlike a coffin, dictating how I am to think, to act and what my life's goals should be. At times, this conditioning of my personality has been direct, but most times it has been subtle, and even more insidious.

My involvement in the independence movement has provided me with the necessary challenges and opportunities which have helped me to deal with my own limitations, insecurities and lack of awareness. I am stronger today than I was years before. And, there's no doubt in my mind that tomorrow I will be even stronger.



POW Haydeé Beltrán

FPR! What impact have the POWs had on the independence movement?

Ida Luz: Never for a moment have I doubted the correctness of our POW position — especially believing as I do that the Puerto Rican nation is on the defensive as our precious island homeland is besieged and threatened with extinction. It has been these historical

conditions which throughout our national experience have created the need for and existence of sectors within the independence movement which have embraced armed struggle. We embrace armed tactics and strategy solely in defense of the future of our people and the integrity of Puerto Rico's flora and fauna. Military targets have been well chosen, never intentionally placing the lives of innocent human beings in jeopardy. The Puerto Rican POWs embraced armed struggle not because we are against life, but because we are battling against our imperialist foe, which is accelerating the destruction of our



POW Dylcia Pagán



POW Alicia Rodríguez

Ida Luz Rodríguez Speaks...

motherland. How many can honestly say that they will not pick up a gun in defense of their home and loved ones? This is precisely what we have done. We have sacrificed our personal freedom for the freedom of our motherland.

We embraced armed struggle because dialogue was, and continues to be, out of the question. This is not through any decision of ours, but because of our imperialist foe's arrogance, its demeaning behavior, and refusal to treat Puerto Ricans as human beings worthy of respect and freedom. We face an adversary driven by its own class interests and greed. How, I ask you, is dialogue possible under these conditions? My answer is that it isn't. Not now. Not until these conditions change.

What I am saying follows through with the support that the POWs are receiving. We are perceived as patriots. This is evident in the support that William Morales received from a large sector of the Puerto Rican nation and its allies which made it possible for William to be safe and free in Cuba. We saw this again in the campaign waged to close down the Lexington Women's Control Unit. A campaign which was nurtured by the resistance of compañeras Alejandrina Torres, Sylvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg, who refused the US government's intentions to break their resistance. There have been international forums and conferences which have recognized and affirmed the political character of the incarceration of the Puerto Rican POWs, as well as the right of the Puerto Rican nation to be free.



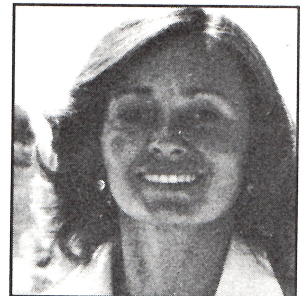
POW Alejandrina Torres

FPR! What is the role of women's organizations in the independence movement?

Ida Luz: Without a doubt there is a need for women's organizations within the Puerto Rican independence movement. It is true that our struggle for national liberation concerns both women and men, since both sexes are oppressed and exploited by the same colonial structure. We need to understand that as long as women are oppressed, men cannot be free, and vice-versa. One cannot dehumanize another, without dehumanizing her/himself.

Nonetheless, women experience an added dimension of oppression. We suffer the effects of sexism, which places women in an inferior and subordinate position in relation to men. We are not believed to have minds, just bodies which we need to dress up and decorate to satisfy men. Our situation worsens when women internalize these distortions and myths. I need to add here that as a Puerto Rican woman, racism has been another factor in my development.

How can women struggle effectively against our oppression? We can begin by joining together and sharing our experiences, studying the roots of our oppression and our alternatives together. We need to fight against our most formidable enemy, which some of us have called a colonized-chained mentality. Why do I believe so? Because it is through this vehicle that a vise is maintained around our minds — locking our consciousness within a frame which serves nefarious interests. We need to disable old thought processes which only hinder our development. Women must carry on this process on some levels separately, but at other levels in conjunction with our male comrades.



POW Carmen Valentín

Please write to Ida Luz at the address below:

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5701 8th Street
Camp Parks
Dublin, CA 94558



Political Prisoner
Lucy Berríos Berríos



Political Prisoner
Dora García

Moving Forward...

sharply with the US judiciary system, which does not recognize that Puerto Rico is a colony, and therefore, the POW position.

To the world, the POWs proclaim that they—and the Puerto Rican nation—are at war with the US—a war from within the borders of the United States. The strategic importance of actually attacking the US from within cannot be underestimated. Ho Chi Minh said during the Vietnam War, "If we had three million Vietnamese in the US, the war would have been over a long time ago."

Many of us ask, "but wouldn't it be better if these committed people were free to do political organizing on the outside?" And, this is true. But at what price? Nelson Mandela, Bobby Sands and Lolita Lebrón have inspired their nations to struggle because their actions have demonstrated that individual freedom, and even life, will not take precedence over the commitment to free one's nation.

It has been said that taking the POW position, and thus not presenting a defense in the traditional terms of US courts, ensured that the US government would win—and give the POWs long prison sentences. To believe this, is to accept that there is a system of impartial justice in the US. The recent case of Oliver North demonstrates that the US will disregard its own laws to protect one of its own. Can we believe that the US government would really grant probation or low sentences to people who have directly challenged the right of the US to control its colony in Puerto Rico?

The POW position has generated considerable national and international support as demonstrated by two recent successful campaigns around POWs Alejandrina Torres and William Morales. The closure of the Lexington Women's Control Unit in August 1988, where Puerto Rican POW Alejandrina Torres, and anti-imperialists Sylvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg were held, resulted from an extensive mobilization to expose the repressive nature of the control unit. From demonstrations, phone campaigns, a unanimous resolution passed in the Puerto Rican Senate, to support from the ACLU, Amnesty International and international declarations—broad religious, civic and international condemnation of the control unit was voiced. The US government was forced to shut down its one million-dollar psychological torture project.

That same month, the Mexican government refused to

permit the US to extradite convicted FALN member and POW William Morales to the US to serve his prison sentence. Instead, after pressure from the Puerto Rican independence movement, the Mexican government released William Morales to be safely transported to Cuba.

The campaigns to close the Lexington Control Unit and to prevent the extradition of William Morales were inspired by the success of the earlier movement to free the Puerto Rican Nationalists. In 1979, US President Jimmy Carter granted an unconditional pardon to Puerto Rican Nationalists Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Oscar Collazo and Irving Flores who spent over a quarter century in US prisons. Letters, demonstrations, international support and armed actions by the FALN made it more costly for the US to keep them than to let them go.

The lessons, experience and victories of these past campaigns laid the groundwork and vision for the **Freedom Now! National Campaign for Amnesty and Human Rights**, which was launched at the UN headquarters in New York on December 12, 1988—International Human Rights Day.

The **Freedom Now! Campaign** is a coalition of friends, family members and support committees of political prisoners and POWs held in US prisons including the **National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War** and the **Free Puerto Rico Committee**. To date, the campaign has adopted roughly 100 political prisoners and POWs in the US. These men and women represent the Puerto Rican independence, Black/New Afrikan Liberation, Native American, Irish, Plowshares and North American anti-imperialist movements. The goal of the campaign is to expose and stop human rights abuses, as well as to obtain the ultimate release of political prisoners and POWs in the United States.

The recent release of Nelson Mandela represents a tremendous victory. The strength of the movement forced the government of South Africa to release him on his own terms. Moreover, Nelson Mandela's uncompromising commitment to the struggle to end apartheid after 27 years in South African prisons stands as an inspiration and challenge to us all.

As we celebrate Nelson Mandela's freedom, we also mark ten years of unwavering commitment and sacrifice by the Puerto Rican POWs held in US prisons. The victory in South Africa brings new energy and hope to the work to win their freedom.

Free Puerto Rico Committee is a national organization that works to develop understanding and support for the struggle of the Puerto Rican people—invaded and seized by the US military in 1898—to liberate their nation and to establish an independent socialist society. As North Americans, we in **FPRC** work under the leadership of the **Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueño**, a US-based organization of Puerto Rican patriots. We have written material, slide and film programs on such topics as the 2020 Plan, the history of Puerto Rico and the independence movement. Please write or call the chapter nearest you to obtain a brochure, or to set up an audiovisual program and discussion.

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WE NEED YOU!